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# editor's letter



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Where we live and where we work, the influence architects wield on these environments can affect every facet of our lives. Well-designed workspaces can increase productivity, while a carefully crafted home can ease stress.

The ways in which architects manipulate the spaces we occupy, place the things we use, and select the materiality of the things we touch—ultimately—is what makes great architecture. In this issue of *Iowa Architect*, we examine the importance of the architect's role in some of these successful home and office projects.

**Evan Shaw, AIA**

*Editor, Iowa Architect*

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New home in the Dakota Dunes features a gracefully twisted roof. *Martini Modern with a Twist*, p. 16.

# Masonry Institute of Iowa

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Warren Cultural Center  
Greenfield, Iowa



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Des Moines, Iowa  
Architect in Charge:  
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## Architectural writer and photographer combine their artistry on video

WORDS: LIZ LIDGETT



Two honorary members of AIA Iowa, both living 2,000 miles away in California, are collaborating for the first time. Mark E. Blunck, Hon. AIA Iowa, an architectural writer, and Farshid Assassi, Hon. AIA Iowa, an architectural photographer, are joining forces to create short videos meant to showcase architecture.

Blunck and Assassi first met in 2001 at Assassi's Santa Barbara home while Blunck was in town for an exhibit at the University of California, Santa Barbara for architect and furniture designer Paul Tuttle, former Fellow of the AIA. Both men have been contributors to *Iowa Architect* magazine for decades (Blunck since the late '80s and Assassi since the late '70s) and Blunck was often sent Assassi's images to write about for the magazine. Although this video project is their first official collaboration, they have been working together serendipitously for years.

Assassi is a prominent photographer and videographer and his images have garnered more than 300 awards for his clients, including national, regional, and state AIA awards. Blunck has been a freelance author for 27 years and has had his nationally recognized work appear in 15 publications. With a combined 60 years of experience, they decided to use their collective expertise to offer photography and video services to the design community, including architects, designers, engineers, contractors, and artists.

"Excellent photography and well-written articles combine to illustrate the design talent within a firm to current clients and potential clients. Many sites have the standard type, with people giving long explanations on the design and have



Top: Farshid Assassi Below: Mark E. Blunck

little impact on the viewer. Creating these short, artistic videos is something new to the profession and will enable the firm to be recognized as a cut above other firms, showing innovation and creativity," says Blunck.

Assassi will be shooting all of the video for the pieces and any photography needed, while Blunck will provide the narrative. In order to keep the viewer actively engaged with the video, each will drive the message home about the architecture by showing the work in an innovative way. These short films will give the viewer the sense of walking through the building and understanding how each component comes together to create something beautiful without ever stepping a foot through the door. "The creativity of architectural writing is looking at the images separately, isolating specific elements," says Blunck, "and then visualizing the images together and describing how the components visually come together."

It feels as though this joint effort, although recent, has been decades in the making. Between their chance encounters through *Iowa Architect* magazine and their notoriety in architecture, collaboration between these two honorary AIA Iowa members feels natural. By way of Iowa to California, these videos will continue their great work in the field.

-----

*Liz Lidgett is a writer and art advisor and works with corporate art collections throughout the state.*

*To contact Assassi, call 805-895-7703; to contact Blunck, call 510-272-9064.*

# I collected

# New law helps architects assist during emergencies

WORDS: ABBY GILMAN

When record flooding led to the declaration of 83 Iowan counties as disaster areas in 2008, the newly formed AIA Iowa Disaster Assistance Committee, including licensed architects from across the state, was called in to assess the damage. The architects volunteered their time to offer evaluations with virtually zero liability protection.

That all changed when Governor Branstad signed the Sovereign Immunity for Architects and Engineers bill into law on March 26. The law, an extension of the Iowa Tort Claims Act, protects registered architects from being held personally and professionally liable when assisting in certain emergency situations.

Currently, 24 states have some form of Good Samaritan protection for architects, and another four have broad Good Samaritan protection, though not specific to architects. "We wanted to make sure there was something in place that was

more definite," Thomas Hurd, AIA, Chair of the American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter Disaster Assistance Committee, says of the Iowa law.

The law took effect July 1, protecting the roughly 60 members of the Disaster Assistance Committee. Each member must undergo a one-day training program to meet the architecture program standards as well as the Department of Public Safety standards, during which they run through situational disasters. "We have guidelines on how to assess the damages and what percentages are considered light to severe, and criteria that would dictate whether we would go out and put the placard on the building saying that it's safe to occupy, it's not safe to occupy, or somewhere in between," says Hurd.

Under the new law, members of the Disaster Assistance Committee called to assist within 90 days after a disaster,

emergency, or catastrophic event will act as employees of the state for the duration of the emergency. If an architect is sued for services provided while acting as a volunteer employee for the state, the state will become the defendant and possibly be liable of wrongdoing, so long as the architect did not act with willful or intentional misconduct.

"Some of the biggest challenges were to understand that we weren't trying to protect ourselves unduly and it really was for a good cause. Without it, there would be essentially nobody who could afford to take the risk," Hurd says. "Everybody wanted to help their communities and other communities, but they just couldn't take the risk if they didn't have some sort of protection. Talking with some architects after this law passed, they're much more interested in doing it."



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# profile

Person of  
Interest

# Mike Nelson

## Development with a vision

WORDS: HANNAH GILMAN

“Out with the old, in with the new” is no more. For Mike Nelson, owner of Nelson Construction & Development, it’s all about “in with the old, in with the new.” Nelson’s boutique firm, which celebrates its 15-year anniversary in 2014, is a unique construction and development company with a real penchant for rehabbing older buildings—but that’s not all. His company has become a one-stop shop for making Des Moines a better place to work and live: Beyond offering consulting and accounting services, Nelson Construction & Development is quick to drop in and help other owners who’ve hit a wall and need a little help getting their project to completion. Because for Nelson, it’s all about revitalizing Des Moines as a whole, and that’s something everyone can get behind.

“What I get out of Mike is somebody with a vision,” says Danny Heggen, who was recently brought on as a development project manager at Nelson Design & Construction. “I think a great leader asks great questions, and that’s what I immediately notice about Mike. He’s inquisitive. ‘How do we want to live?’ ‘How do we want Des Moines to be now, and in 100 years?’ ‘What kind of environment can we create right now that’s going to stay around like that?’”

Nelson says what appeals to him is paying attention to macro trends—and then attempting to apply those trends in the context of what’s needed locally. Nelson, who works and lives in Des Moines with his wife Jill and three children Ben, Megan, and Emily, says the future of the city is bright, and that when it comes to making Des Moines a better place to work and live, it’s all about collaboration, not competition. A bevy of buildings coming online in Des Moines in the near future means growth, and growth is good. Also good? Innovation.

Alexander Grgurich, who works with Nelson as the business lead at Fresk Interactive, says Nelson really engages the creative process in a way that’s refreshing. “He respects younger talent and creative people without belittling them,

and instead empowers them,” says Grgurich. “I think it’s rare to find someone who isn’t set in their ways and is flexible and understands that he doesn’t have all the answers.” And not having all the answers means Nelson’s on a mission to go out and get them. “He listens to people, and has been able to get out ahead of things and really build an area and be a catalyst for it,” continues Grgurich. “He’s humble about it, but I think he’s been one of the most impactful people in the development of downtown Des Moines.”

Nelson says his interest in pursuing a career in the construction industry was ignited by a strong desire to create things that would stand the test of time. “Construction provides that now,” says Nelson. “Buildings will stand for 100 years or more.” But perhaps his interest was sparked by

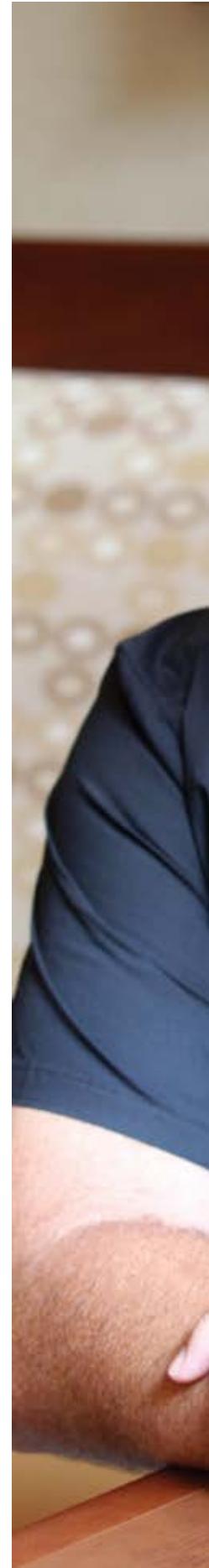
more than simply a desire to create longstanding architecture. “My parents were entrepreneurs and started a successful dairy consulting business,” says Nelson, who was raised in Decorah and graduated with a degree in construction engineering from Iowa State University. “Much of its growth was discussed

every evening at home where they kept the office.” The company, which exists to this day and is run by Nelson’s brother in the Twin Cities, served as an inspiration for Nelson as a child. “I admired the risks my parents took and how hard they worked to grow something from zero, and the impact that business had on its employees’ and business partners’ lives has always stuck with me.”

Impacting employees and business partners? That’s something any business would be happy to achieve. But impacting an entire community? Nelson Construction & Development does just that for not only Des Moines, but throughout the Midwest. “It’s a rewarding environment in which to work, so I’m proud to be a person who’s paid attention to what’s happening on a larger scale and be narcissistic about applying it to my own environment,” he says. It’s safe to say Des Moines is proud of Nelson, too.

He’s humble about it, but I think he’s been one of the most impactful people in the development of downtown Des Moines.

ALEXANDER GRGURICH, FRESK INTERACTIVE





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# on the boards

**Projects  
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## Southeastern Community College Health Occupations Building

Burlington / DLR Group

Southeastern Community College's new Health Occupations Building uses a two-story design to create a welcoming entrance to the West Burlington campus. Using transparency and building massing, DLR Group's design reflects a progressive image and a sense of belonging representative of the SCC Master Plan. These unifying characteristics

also are incorporated into DLR Group's design of the new Industrial Maintenance Technology (IMT) building on the Keokuk campus. Both projects intentionally emphasize collaboration and socialization as the design team strives to create campus environments where students feel important and connected to SCC.

The Health Occupations Building encompasses 38,500 square feet and includes new construction as well as adaptive reuse and renovation of the existing 1970 facility. The new IMT Building comprises 17,700 square feet of space with the central corridor's elevated roofline allowing clerestory lighting and complementing its surroundings. DLR Group is providing integrated architecture and engineering services.

## Market One

Des Moines / Neumann Monson Architects

Market One is an adaptive reuse of the Advance Rumley Thresher Company Building, 130 E. 3rd Street in the Market District of Des Moines. The original building was constructed in 1901, expanded to three floors in 1912, and burned to one floor in 1918. The building was rebuilt with modifications after that fire to its current state. It is being repurposed as approximately 30,000 square feet of tenant lease space. A terrace and shade structure are being added to the roof level, along with a small private office for the building owner. The project also incorporates a 1,300-panel solar canopy over an adjacent parking lot to offset building electrical loads and lower the site-heat island effect. The Market One building is anticipated to have a net-zero energy consumption when completed and is seeking LEED Platinum designation. Completion is slated for late 2014.





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# MARTIN MODERN

## *with a twist*

**WORDS:** MARK E. BLUNCK, HON. AIA IOWA  
**IMAGES:** FARSHID ASSASSI, HON. AIA IOWA  
**ARCHITECT:** KNOWLES BLUNCK ARCHITECTURE

**Above Right:** The juxtaposition of black framing materials against richly colored cedar emphasizes the horizontal and rectilinear nature of the design. Massive horizontal steel beams between ground level and the main level eliminate torsional movement; three structural concrete walls provide material contrast and respect the clients' desire for the material, while smaller steel beams and columns in upper levels combine with wood floor trusses and walls of wood stud construction.

**Left:** The house is composed of overlapping and projected horizontal and vertical components to visually fragment the 96-foot-long elevation. The overhang projection was partially calculated by computer modeling but the primary factor was the sense of proportion desired.



Twentieth-century modern residential architecture has primarily been the design refinement of the basic box. This space container appeals to architects for its material efficiency and ease of construction. The flat roofs associated with this design archetype further established this simple architectural vocabulary. It is the execution of details, however, that separates the well-designed modern home from mundane attempts by lesser architects.

While we admire the works of Philip Johnson, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Charles and Ray Eames, and all Case Study House architects, along with contemporaneous Eichler Homes (California programs encouraged by postwar optimism and temperate weather) we are also aware that such fine architecture is not always assured.

This endeavor to continuously alter the principal form is evident as architects have worked vigorously to refresh the modern

home. A recent project by Knowles Blunck Architecture continues this venture in a home for clients in the Dakota Dunes of South Dakota.

The client was a couple from India and whose search for an architecture firm began in the Sioux City Public Library. According to the client, "We randomly selected three Des Moines architectural firms listed in the Iowa Architect Directory with experience in modern residential design. Why Des Moines? We felt that we could reasonably meet with firm principals while in the city for the annual art fair during the last weekend in June." Their interest in modern architecture began in 2004, shortly after acquiring a traditional Midwestern house. Even at that early point, "We were already thinking ahead of purchasing a vacant lot to build something modern that would be constructed primarily of steel, concrete, and glass."

The architect's involvement in the design process began with a visit to the couple's existing



home to discuss how they lived and what features must be in the new modern house. "My wife loves to cook Indian meals and we informed them of her cooking and planning needs, and my only request was an art gallery. The entire process was a great learning experience and incredibly exciting."

Taking into account the minimal program requirements, the architects presented the couple with five proposals of varying massing options. The built design is a perfect topographical response to the Midwestern landscape, as the 96-foot length reiterates the prairie setting, and the gracefully twisted roof element represents the serene flow of a river. One may surmise that walking back and forth nearly 100 feet to reach all main-level living spaces would be a nuisance, but it does eliminate the need for climbing stairs throughout the day. Such an elongated structure needs design components to visually fragment the exterior horizontal expanse. This was accomplished by projecting wall sections two feet from the facade to create an art gallery on the riverside and additional storage on the street side. Both visual and practical needs were resolved with this effective solution.

The eye-catching, slightly twisted roof contrasts with the rectilinear composition and

distinguishes itself from other homes in the development. "The design covenants do not allow flat roofs in residential construction and the roof must meet specific slope standards. This design is twisted on diagonally opposite ends to meet those minimal roof slope requirements. The two equal height points are where the sun rises and sets and puts direct sunlight into the spaces," says project architect Evan Shaw, AIA. This design element can be interpreted as both an expression of flowing water and the graceful sweep of a boat's bow.

Since the living spaces are elevated above ground-floor garage, storage, and entry areas, another pleasing element was created with an aperture providing a "through view" from the street to the river. As with the twisted roof plane, no other home in the area has this feature, and neighbors have commented favorably with "interesting" and "dynamic" as the most frequent responses. The inclusion of a water feature was Shaw's response to one of the couple's concerns. "We needed to put something in the aperture as otherwise our Indian guests will conveniently park their vehicles there when they come over, thinking that it is an open parking space!"

The interior configuration is a logical response to the couple's desire for simplicity.

All of the necessary daily living requirements are satisfied on a single floor, albeit a long expanse, providing inspiring river views and an art gallery, soon to be filled with modern art—a rewarding influence from working with architects on their modern home. The interior reveals a John Pawson-inspired minimalism approach with dark, oak-stained planar cabinetry and sand-etched glass. This black-and-white color palette is a common feature of many modern residences and serves as the perfect neutral backdrop for introducing color with furniture and artwork.

One observation perfectly sums up the couple's positive design experience: "The house has a feel of peace and quiet that we love. I remember the first night after we moved in. It was a full moon and I awoke during the night and was enthralled to see the shimmering Missouri River and the bedroom flooded with moonlight. It was magical."

-----  
*Mark E. Blunck, Hon. AIA Iowa, is a freelance writer based in San Francisco and is a frequent contributor to Iowa Architect.*

**Above:** A Dakota Dunes residence set in an affluent development in South Dakota alongside the Missouri River is designed to maximize daylight and river views, while providing intimacy and privacy. This is achieved through the use of a twisted roof plane that bathes the master bedroom with morning light, and illuminates the living room late in the day, following the natural lifestyle of the clients.

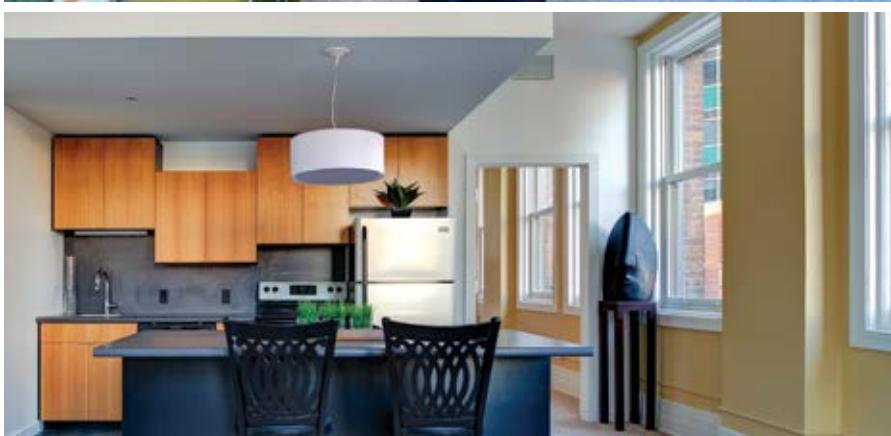
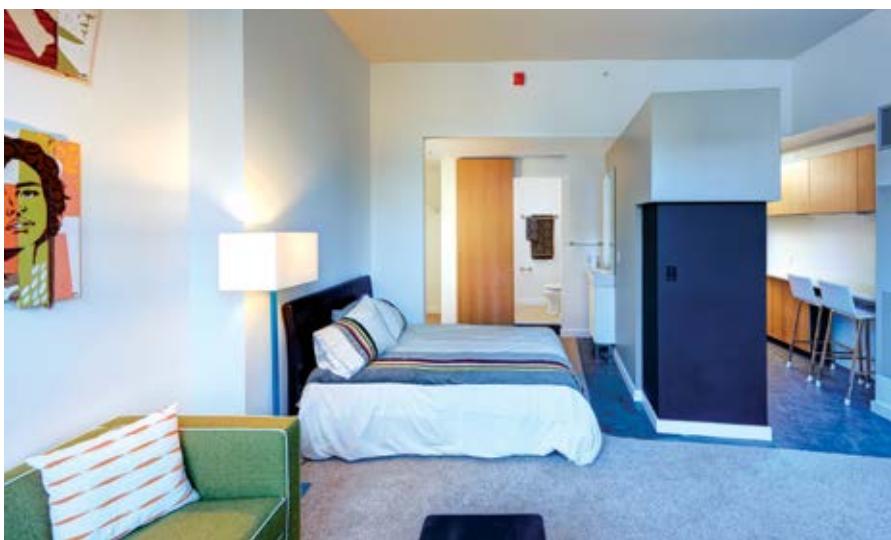


The clients desired a one-time-only house project, so all interior materials were selected for durability and efficiency. The main level flooring is waxed concrete with

dark-stained oak cabinetry that provides contrast to white walls and sand-etched glass panels.

The iconic Fleming Building, which was constructed by Daniel Burnham in 1909, was the first high-rise in Des Moines. Nelson Construction & Development houses its offices on the second floor of the Fleming Building.





There's a lot of beauty in history, and Slingshot Architecture and Nelson Construction & Development have not only figured that out, but also made it their mission to preserve as much history—and beauty—as they can. In this case, they've linked up to rehab Des Moines' famous 6th and Walnut Fleming Building, which is, arguably, one of the most important buildings in the downtown area. After all, the 1909 "skyscraper" was Des Moines' first steel high-rise constructed by the one and only Daniel Burnham, a famous Chicago architect who designed the iconic Flatiron Building in New York City. It was only fitting that two firms with such a knack for giving old buildings new life while celebrating their former ones came together to pay Des Moines' first high-rise the attention it deserves—and that's exactly what they achieved with the Fleming Building.

"It's a prominent building in Des Moines," says Slingshot Architecture's John Bloom, AIA, who served as the project manager for the Fleming Building and worked alongside principals Dan Drendel, AIA, and David Voss, AIA, on the project. "And because it was designed by the Burnham Company, for us architects that's meaningful." Burnham, who's known for bringing structural steel high-rises to New York City and the Midwest after a particularly inspiring visit to the Eiffel Tower, is also known for acting as the director of works for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. "As an architect, you always feel this responsibility to the owner to design a good product, and in this case, there was an extra layer of importance associated with this building because of that."

Slingshot Architecture is known for doing an enormous amount of work in downtown Des Moines, and that includes a lot of conversion projects of historical buildings into new uses, says Bloom. But Slingshot and Nelson Construction & Development weren't the first people to get their hands on the building. A major renovation was done in the 1930s to the common spaces, and tenants had made their own touches here and there over the years. "When we first started the project, we really wanted to understand how much original fabric was still in there, so we did an inventory of the entire building and produced a set of as-built drawings that identified original doors, walls, and

# UPCYCLING

## Preserving Des Moines' First High-Rise

WORDS: HANNAH GILMAN | IMAGES: CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA | ARCHITECT: SLINGSHOT ARCHITECTURE



fabric. Anything outside the period of significance was mostly removed.”

Slingshot Architecture’s plans showed what was original and what wasn’t, and its goal was to keep performance at the forefront of the project while maintaining the integrity of the building. “We weren’t able to save every single wall or door in its original location, but we did what we could to design and work around the original fabric,” says Bloom. The Fleming Building had four levels with an enormous amount of original fabric in the corridors, which included marble veneers, wainscoting, and doors with transoms. “Those floors were sort of our basis of design,” says Bloom. “On all the floors, we kept the width of the original corridor, even if it wasn’t there anymore. Doors were sized to match the original size of the door openings, and they always had the door in a certain place

within the grid of the building, so we used that grid even if nothing was original.” But Slingshot didn’t try to rebuild history—they simply wanted to preserve what was already there. “We never tried to restore anything—where the trim stopped, we didn’t try to restart it and pretend like it was always there. We didn’t try to imitate anything in the building.”

The first two floors of the 11-story building are commercial—the first holds an urban market, while the second holds Nelson Construction & Development’s offices—and upper floors house market-rate apartments. “About 60 percent of the units are studios, and that was something that was market-driven by a market analysis that Slingshot did with Nelson. We accomplished contemporary studios in this historical setting, and also created large living areas for the studio units that

still have some division or idea of space,” says Bloom, who noted that the goal was to maximize the livable space while keeping areas such as the bedroom and kitchen tucked away.

“The Fleming Building was a little ahead of its time because it was one of Des Moines’ first buildings to roll out what I call efficiencies or micro-units for half of the units,” says the owner of Nelson Construction & Development Mike Nelson, who worked alongside The Baker Group’s B.J. Baker on the project. “These are all market-rate units. The person who works downtown has a certain amount of money they want to spend on rent, and the smarter you can get the smaller design, the more likely you are to fit within their budget,” he says. “That’s the key piece about Fleming—many of the units are smaller, but Slingshot did such a good job



with the design that they don't feel small, and they fit within the budget that the person who just got their first or second job can afford." With Des Moines' growing reputation as one of the best cities for young professionals, the Fleming Building couldn't have come at a better time.

"The design is very nice, and it creates this unique living space. It's such a great location and a great building, and I think that was equally as important as anything we did," says Bloom. "And Nelson Construction & Development took on the risk and challenge of renovating a 100-plus-year-old building."

And the risks will keep on coming. Nelson, who's currently working on the Des Moines Building just down the street, says he shares the excitement for buildings being constructed by other developers. "I'm excited to see the Equitable Building

come online; I'm excited to see the Des Moines Register Building come online. I think all these projects create a critical mass and we don't see it as competitive, we just see it as complementary. The more units we can get within the core, the more likely we are to see commercial support, and that's really what we want to see next. We want to see more restaurants, more entertainment. I think a city that has options is ultimately very sustainable," says Nelson. "The future for downtown Des Moines is pretty bright."

-----  
*Hannah Gilman is a freelance writer living in Seattle, Washington, and a recent Iowa State University graduate.*

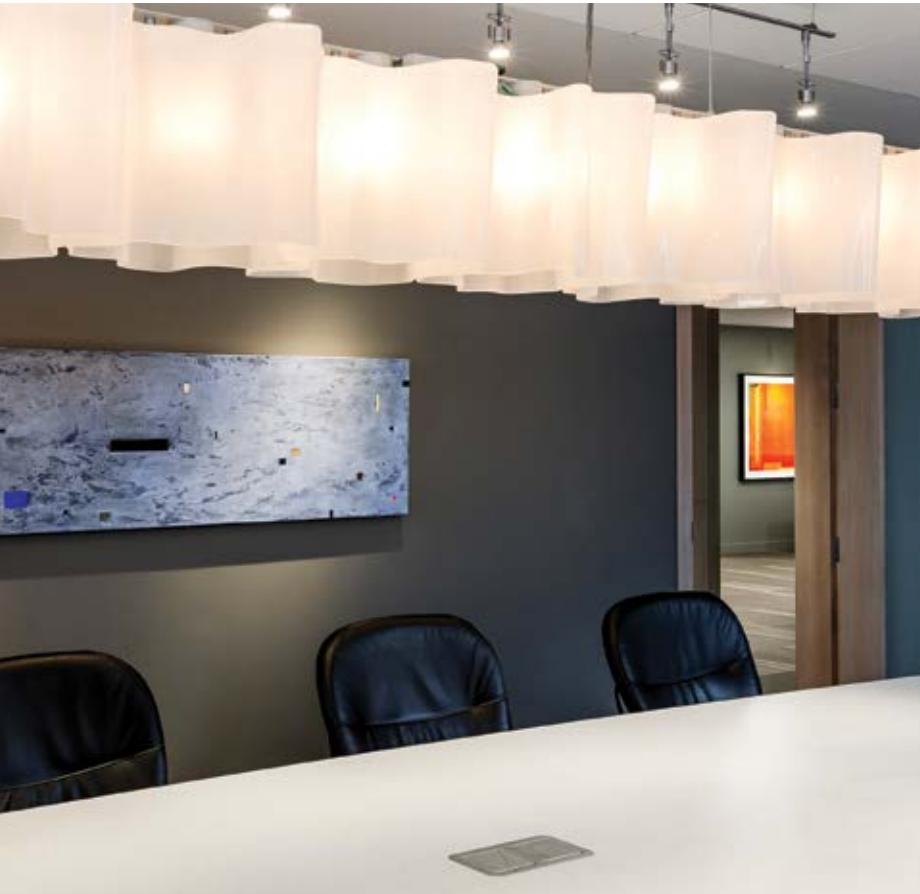
**Page 21, top to bottom:** Partial walls give the illusion of separate rooms in the space-savvy studio apartments. Environmentally friendly finishes and recycled content were employed throughout the kitchen, which—like the rest of the apartment—also boasts energy-efficient lighting.

**Above, left to right:** Energy-efficient thermal-pane windows were swapped out for old clunky ones left over from the 1980s. An open living area not only makes the space feel larger, but allows for opportunity to either close off the bedroom with furniture or leave it as one fluid space. A galley kitchen creates a feeling of separation from the rest of the living space. **Bottom row:** Nelson Construction & Development, which lives on the second floor of the Fleming Building, is known for upcycling historical buildings in the area. Original marble walls and flooring were preserved in the hallways and offer a piece of the past.

WORDS: SUSAN KOENIG-VANDEHAAR IMAGES: PAUL CROSBY ARCHITECT: SUBSTANCE ARCHITECTURE

# LIGHT and *curves*

Substance turns challenges into advantages





**Opposite:** The administrative area provides a clear path throughout the floor, and is punctuated with artwork that adds a color punch to the palette of browns and grays. The curved ribbon walls that wrap around the interior are the highlight of this space as one travels from the more open areas to the narrower, dedicated passageways.

**This photo:** The sculptural artwork by Pete Goché, AIA, the focal point of the reception area.

Architects see things many of us don't. They look at space and envision design that the rest of us can't. Case in point: The law offices of Faegre Baker Daniels, an international law firm, are a creative transformation of light and curves, with the added detail of exquisite artwork, some specifically commissioned for the space. The building now includes offices and administrative areas covering two floors that are connected by a centrally placed internal stairway.

The unique footprint for this building presents challenges. It is a landmark building because of its exterior shape, which is replicated in the interior areas. Light for the interior areas is provided by the outer perimeter windows. Blocking off this area with office space would not allow the natural light to penetrate the interior core. The design by Substance Architecture solves this problem by separating the outer perimeter from the administrative space by translucent glass that allows daylight to permeate throughout. These panels allow for privacy of the offices, and also for natural light to flood the interior. Translucent panels mask the central stair, softening the sharp edges of the staircase.

The administrative area provides a clear path throughout the floor, and is punctuated with artwork that adds a color punch to the palette of browns and

grays. The curved ribbon walls that wrap around the interior are the highlight of this space, creating an interesting experience, as one travels from the more open areas to the narrower, dedicated passageways. The soft curves of this ribbon effect have also been replicated in the chandelier of a conference room; the sculptural artwork by Pete Goché, AIA, that is the focal point of the reception area; and the shadow that is created above a couch.

The belief by the late businessman and serious art collector Watson Powell Jr. that "creativity in the workplace causes creativity in the work" is the perfect quote to describe the redesign of this 27,500-square-foot space. It is not just a creative use of space, it is an artfully done vision of adapting the challenging building design, the geometric signature feature of the tallest building in the downtown area, and transforming it into an impressive new home for the law firm. This unique design allows those who work there to not just have a place to work, but also to be immersed in a beautiful, well-designed workspace.

-----  
*Susan Koenig-Vandehaar is an elementary art teacher in Des Moines and freelance writer.*





# Simply Elegant

Function  
came first but  
Shiffler brought  
style to Weiler  
headquarters

Pat Weiler, president and CEO of Weiler Products in Knoxville, is a straightforward guy. As the head of a company that creates road-paving equipment and heavy machinery, Weiler values function over form. In his original manufacturing plant, Weiler's administrative offices were located within the plant. A tour of those original offices reflects a stereotypical image of a site foreman's office: four simple walls of paint, plaster, and wood; simple office fixtures; no wasted space.

So when Weiler started looking in to expanding his headquarters into an independent, 13,000-square-foot building, his original concept was more of the same.

"I had kind of laid the building out," he says of his original concept. "I was figuring on going ahead with it myself, and it would have looked terrible. But I ran out of time."

So, to help streamline the process, Weiler contacted Shiffler Associates Architects.

"Ultimately, I don't think we strayed too

much from my original layout," Weiler says, "but my design was lacking. They did a great job of making it look good, stuck on the side of this big plant."

Manager D. Bryan Shiffler, AIA, worked with Weiler on the exterior layout and design of the two-story structure, staying close to Weiler's original idea for a straightforward, uncluttered design. Keeping an eye toward simplicity and economy, the exterior comprises classic red brick accented with black steel lintels. Windows look in on office space along two of the building's sides and are covered in a dark glazing, protecting the interior from daytime sunlight.

The most striking feature of the exterior is the black tower rising above the building's entryway. Housing the stairway, the tower extends 14 feet above the roof and is home to the company logo, bearing the Weiler name.

The Weiler building is also built with expansion in mind. Weiler has expanded

**WORDS:** CHAD TAYLOR

**IMAGES:** CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA

**ARCHITECT:** SHIFFLER ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS

Shiffler Associates made liberal use of the Weiler chevron. From interior glass and the reception desk, down to the cut pattern in the sidewalk leading up to the building. One of the most impressive visual features is the reception desk. Fabricated on-site by Weiler's own machines, the desk is 3,000 pounds of solid steel and features Weiler's distinctive chevron design.

his manufacturing plant four times in recent years, to its current 176,000-square-foot size. He wanted the same growth capabilities in his headquarters, so one side of the building was left featureless, allowing it to be easily opened up when the time is right.

"It might be 100 years," Weiler says of expansion, "but we've got the space, so it's better to have the option than to not."

When it came to improving upon Weiler's original aesthetics, Shiffler brought in project architect Brent Hoffman, Assoc. AIA.

"It's very challenging," says Hoffman of Weiler's desire for simplicity. "When you're given a limited palette of materials, it's challenging because you need to design simply, but you want the details to be elegant."

Hoffman's interior solutions are

indeed elegant in their simplicity. He opted to have the office interior reflect the industrial nature of the factory that it's fronting: The space features poured concrete floors, as well as industrial lighting and duct work. The floor plan is divided into two by an open atrium, and the two sides of the second floor are connected by open catwalks, again emulating a factory setting. And the Weiler signature chevron detail permeates the office's two floors.

The chevron design in particular is an important detail in the building's design. Heavy industrial machinery doesn't lend itself to huge amounts of stylistic freedom. Paint schemes are extremely limited, due to safety concerns on roadway worksites, and machine design doesn't allow for much custom body work. So the only ways to make Weiler machines stand out are in

When you're given a limited palette of materials, it's challenging because you need to design simply, but you want the details to be elegant.

BRENT HOFFMAN, ASSOC. AIA



the details. Namely, the Weiler name and logo, and the black chevrons added to the yellow paint scheme. Hoffman made sure to incorporate this important personal marker into the building's design wherever possible, starting in the parking lot.

"One thing you'll notice as you walk into the building is a subtle element in the sidewalk," he said. "It could have been done with standard cut joints, but instead, everything is done at an angle, which represents those chevrons."

Along the sidewalk, the chevrons are repeated in cement blocks of varying heights, some rising a foot and a half off the ground to act as seating for employees on breaks. The chevron theme is carried inside the building, and is seen on the walls and in the frosted glass that provides privacy for the conference rooms.

Perhaps the crowning piece of the

interior design, however, is the reception desk, which Hoffman designed based on Weiler equipment.

"When you walk in, you're greeted by this 'machine,'" he explained. "The reception desk is a reflection of what's being produced by Weiler, and we definitely wanted it to catch the eye."

Fabricated completely onsite by the Weiler factory, the reception desk is a ton and a half of steel with yellow accents and the Weiler chevrons cut out of the side panels. It's an impressive design and unique office fixture.

The Weiler headquarters has put a professional, modern face on a blue-collar company. It incorporates elements inherent in the products that Weiler builds and sells, and remains true to Weiler's desire for simplicity in form and design. Through the use of classic, low-

cost building materials, and by taking advantage of onsite fabrication abilities, the entire project was completed for just a hair over the median price of a home in Des Moines.

Inside the plant, Weiler's original office space is still in use by the plant foreman. But out front, the new Weiler headquarters stands as a testament to the marriage of form and function, industry and elegance.

"I never would have thought of things like the catwalks upstairs," Weiler says. "Shiffler Associates did a great job with that. It would have been a square box if I did it. All function. These guys brought in the style."

-----

*Chad Taylor is a freelance writer from Des Moines and music critic for Cityview magazine.*





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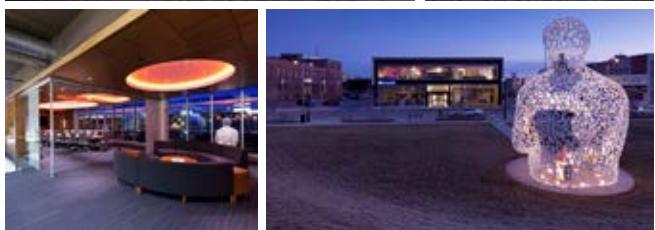
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# new POINT OF VIEW

Design changes the way Flynn Wright works

**WORDS:** BRIANNE SANCHEZ

**IMAGES:** CLARK COLBY, AIA IOWA STUDENT AFFILIATE,  
HOWARD E. DOUGHTY, MATT COEN, AIA

**ARCHITECT:** WALKER COEN LORENTZEN ARCHITECTS

Sit at advertising agency Flynn Wright's custom-built conference table and it's as if Nomade, the centerpiece of the Pappajohn Sculpture Park, is a member of the creative team. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame the stunning artscape, the architecture inspiring the agency toward an ever more collaborative culture and inviting clients in search of a signature brand of playful professionalism.

"There's not another front yard in Des Moines like it," says Mara White, Flynn Wright's director of public relations.

"Nomade became a central point for us."

White served as the agency's creative go-between and project manager for the remodel of 1408 Locust Street, which was completed by Walker Coen Lorentzen Architects in early 2012. She shows off the space with a clear sense of pride.

Peeks of original wood and tile flooring reference the building's 100-year-heritage as a Cadillac dealership, and help ground an otherwise airy and contemporary workspace.

"Our work is constant and our work is customized," White says. "The fact that our owners have invested in the best environment for that creative work to happen is pretty cool."

Designed for collaboration, Flynn Wright features a plethora of unreservable meeting space, like the "campfire" area of circular seating and a hall of bar-height islands that encourage colleagues to gather informally to share ideas (and, if White is honest, make throwing parties a breeze). Offices, which used to be a coveted mark of success in agency life, are becoming extinct, in favor of pod-style work zones

that allow for easier collaboration among departments.

“We’re moving away from distinctive departments,” says Andy Flynn, Flynn Wright president and CEO. “We’re mixing that up, trying to get everybody involved with everybody. Everybody’s important to the process.”

The new building and all-in approach it breeds is showing a significant return, too. Which is why, although the dust from the original remodel has barely settled, Flynn is bringing back Walker Coen Lorentzen and Neumann Brothers, an AIA Iowa Allied Member, for a second phase. The current bays of offices, whose glass returns and front walls give the illusion of openness, will be gutted in favor of more truly open work areas.

Matt Coen, AIA, project architect, entered the picture early on. He was introduced by Proxymity, the property

consulting firm that encouraged Flynn to land his agency on Locust Street. Proxymity conducted early interviews with the Flynn Wright staff to get a sense of the company culture, and Coen sketched out concepts based on the feedback and his deep knowledge of the site.

The project was designed to address three fundamental challenges: The need to create a better work environment; a desire to re-engineer how the company produces work; and to create a higher profile and increased visibility for the agency.

“Each solution, from site selection to furniture layout, was measured against those criteria,” Coen says. “Our goal was to thoroughly understand their business and thus better align their workspace with workflow.”

Another area where Coen’s creativity and Flynn’s drive meshed was conceiving an architectural element that could pay homage to the surrounding sculpture park.

Irregular recessed trays provide ambient light through the use of programmable color-changing LED cove

lights. Functionally, they help define spaces and contribute to acoustical control. But the lights are also an element of visual interest for passers-by who are downtown, experiencing public art.

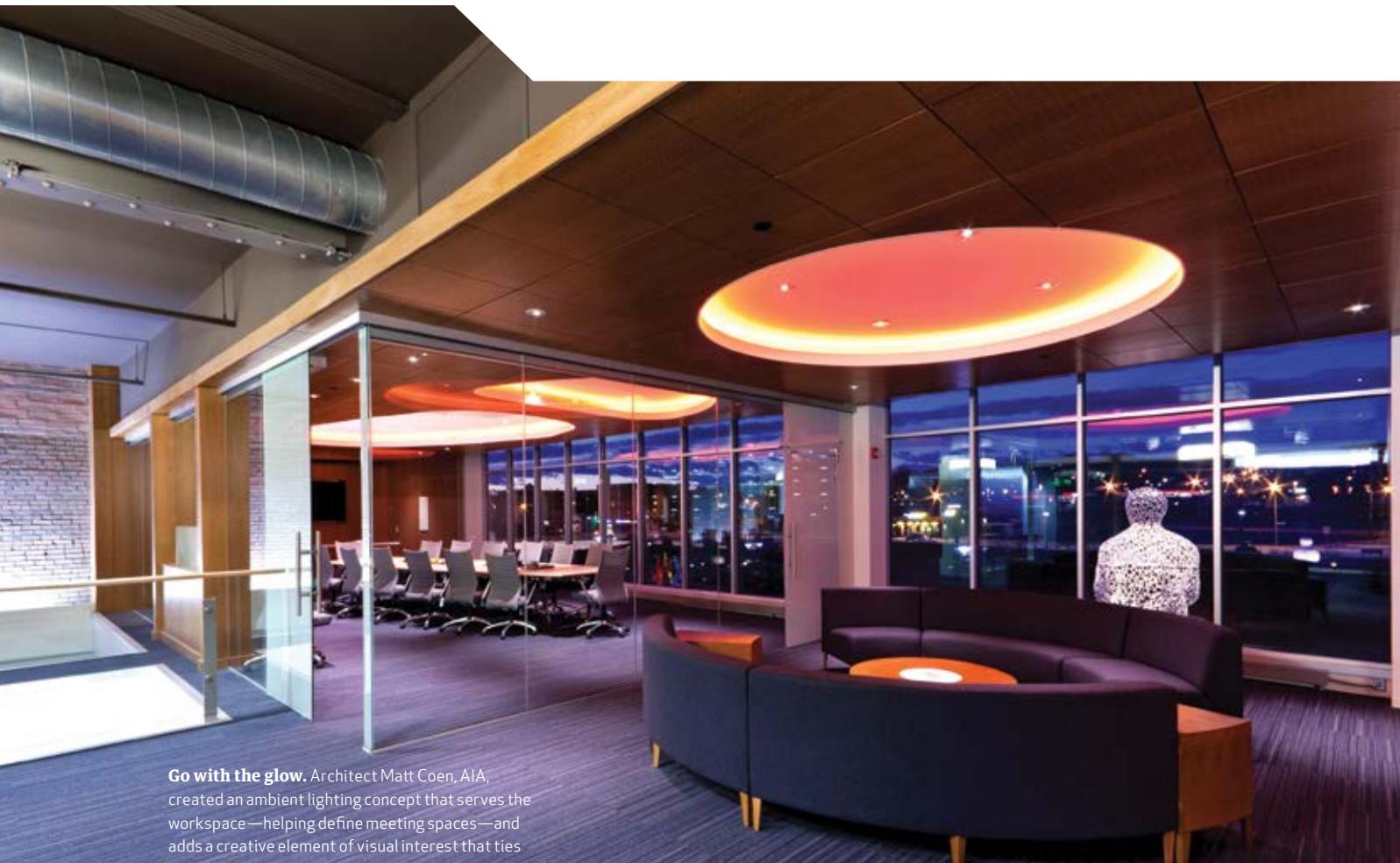
“We felt a responsibility, looking at the Pappajohn Sculpture Park, that we should give back,” Flynn says. “This is our contribution. I think of it almost as light therapy.”

Now a gem of the Western Gateway, the Flynn Wright building and the world-class art across the street exchange a vitality that’s helped attract Microsoft as a second high-profile tenant and Kum & Go headquarters as a future neighbor to the north.

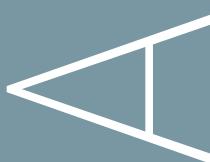
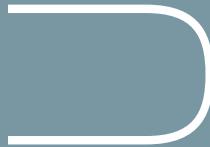
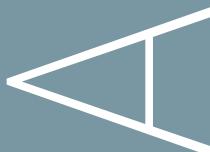
“We finally just envisioned it and I can’t think of a better move,” Flynn says. “I still pinch myself when I come to work every day.”

-----

*Brianne Sanchez is a freelance writer, community builder, and Iowan by choice, based in Des Moines. She grew up around blueprints.*



**Go with the glow.** Architect Matt Coen, AIA, created an ambient lighting concept that serves the workspace—helping define meeting spaces—and adds a creative element of visual interest that ties the office to surrounding sculptures.



A west-side downtown renaissance gets a big boost, thanks to a new space that capitalizes on existing materials and 21st-century work ways.

**WORDS:** KELLY ROBERSON  
**IMAGES:** CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA  
**ARCHITECT:** SLINGSHOT ARCHITECTURE

Look under the rock, take the wrong turn, explore the sudden course: Wise words learned and passed down through the ages. The lesson, of course, is that the best things often turn up in unexpected places—even, as it turns out, beneath acoustical ceiling tiles.

When Greg Wattier, AIA, at Slingshot Architecture and Mark Buleziuk, an owner of Lawmark, pushed up a few of those tiles in the Greater Des Moines Partnership building at 8th and Locust, what they saw would give design direction to the future of Space2Work in downtown Des Moines. Hidden were concrete beams and sloping slabs, full of the distinctive character and personality that the nondescript and outdated tiles and space lacked. “I often refer to things like those structural concrete forms as free architecture,” says Wattier. “They offer both form and material, and become the generator of a design concept.”

The 1970s-era building had plenty of deferred maintenance that owners

and architects had to tackle, but there was more to the renovation than that. Buleziuk, who has completed similar office renovation projects in Winnipeg, Canada, knew that any rental space in the glut of downtown Des Moines offices needed to stand out in order to be successful. “We looked at it thinking about how we could differentiate it and go outside the box, give it new life and attract tenants,” says Buleziuk.

That industrial feel inspired by the “free” architecture, along with a relocated and revamped entry, became the organizing design elements of the two-story Space2Work offices, a collection of rentable, turnkey offices. The Space2Work concept offers access to the amenities of a bigger office space for individuals or companies of any size. That new entry—moved from the 8th Street side to the Locust Street side—gave both access and exposure to the workspaces within. “It’s always intriguing and interesting to expose a 25-year-old building and do



Lots of internal windows help to spread light around from top to bottom and side to side in the renovated office space.

||

I often refer to things like those structural concrete forms as free architecture. They offer both form and material, and become the generator of a design concept.

GREG WATTIER, AIA

||

everything from reinvigorating it to redoing the mechanical system," says Wattier.

From the street, the common spaces—conference room, lounge—provide a contemporary façade. Offices on the second floor, some of which protrude into the atrium, are connected through a series of clear or frosted glass panels or walls as well as to the skywalk and, with a new stair, the first floor. The industrial materials in Space2Work never weigh down the square footage; in fact, the aesthetics are decidedly light and airy, with neutrals, cool colors, and complementary materials in a contemporary mix of hues and shapes.

The 2014 fire in the adjacent old Younkers building set rentals in the space back while repair work is completed, but that catastrophic event turned out to be a catalyst for the building. Wattier and Buleziuk are working on a redesign of the atrium, food court, and skywalk level. "It's exciting to think about the building as a whole, about repositioning it," says Buleziuk. "We'd love to see it become its own destination and brand."

-----  
*Kelly Roberson writes about shelter, gardening, and other topics from Des Moines.*





**Above:** A new orientation of the view helps to solidly anchor the office spaces in the street life along Locust in downtown Des Moines. **Above right:** White and bright finishes reinforce the contemporary style of the shared office spaces. Conference room windows look out toward Locust Street; the concrete structure offered other design cues that would end up in the finished space. Architects and owners are now working on a revamp of the entire building.



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4. How will the architect establish priorities and make decisions?
5. Who from the architecture firm will be dealing with you directly? Is that the same person who will be designing the project? Who will be designing the project?
6. How interested is the architect in this project?
7. How busy is the architect?
8. What sets this architect apart from the rest?
9. How does the architect establish fees?
10. What would the architect expect the fee to be for this project?
11. What are the steps in the design process?
12. How does the architect organize the process?
13. What does the architect expect you to provide?
14. What is the architect's design philosophy?
15. What is the architect's experience/track record with cost estimating?
16. What will the architect show you along the way to explain the project? Will you see models, drawings, or sketches?
17. If the scope of the project changes later in the project, will there be additional fees? How will these fees be justified?
18. What services does the architect provide during construction?
19. How disruptive will construction be? How long does the architect expect it to take to complete your project?
20. Can the architect provide a list of client references?

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# project credits

## Martini Modern With a Twist 16

**Project:** Dakota Dunes  
**Location:** Dakota Dunes, SD  
**Architect:** Knowles Blunck Architecture, AIA Iowa Firm Member  
**Contractor:** Brown Wegher Construction  
**Structural Engineer:** JPSE  
**Photographer:** Farshid Assassi, Hon. AIA Iowa

## Upcycling 20

**Project:** Fleming Building Apartments  
**Location:** Des Moines  
**Architect:** Slingshot Architecture, AIA Iowa Firm Member  
**Contractor:** Nelson Construction Services  
**Engineer:** Raker Rhodes Engineering  
**Engineer MP:** Baker Group  
**Photographer:** Cameron Campbell, AIA

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**Project:** Faegre Baker Daniels  
**Location:** Des Moines  
**Architect:** Substance Architecture, AIA Iowa Firm Member  
**Contractor:** Hansen Company  
**Structural Engineer:** Charles Saul Engineering  
**Mechanical and Electrical Engineer:** Wolin & Associates  
**Photographer:** Paul Crosby

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**Location:** Knoxville

**Architect:** Shiffler Associates Architects, AIA Iowa Firm Member

**Contractor:** Hubbell Construction Services  
**Engineer:** Raker Rhodes Engineering  
**Photographer:** Cameron Campbell, AIA

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**Project:** Flynn Wright Building  
**Location:** Des Moines  
**Architect:** Walker Coen Lorentzen Architects, AIA Iowa Firm Member  
**Interiors Contractor:** Neumann Brothers  
**Shell Contractor:** Koester Construction  
**Engineer:** Charles Saul Engineering  
**Tenant Representative:** Proxymity  
**Real Estate Broker:** Shannon Morton/Ferguson  
**Site Plan:** Confluence  
**Furnishings:** Workspace  
**Photographer:** Clark Colby, AIA Iowa Student Affiliate; Howard E. Doughty; Matt Coen, AIA

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**Project:** Space2Work Offices  
**Location:** Des Moines  
**Architect:** Slingshot Architecture, AIA Iowa Firm Member  
**Contractor:** Beal | Derkenne Construction  
**Engineer:** Raker Rhodes Engineering  
**Mechanical and Electrical Engineer:** MODUS  
**Photographer:** Cameron Campbell, AIA

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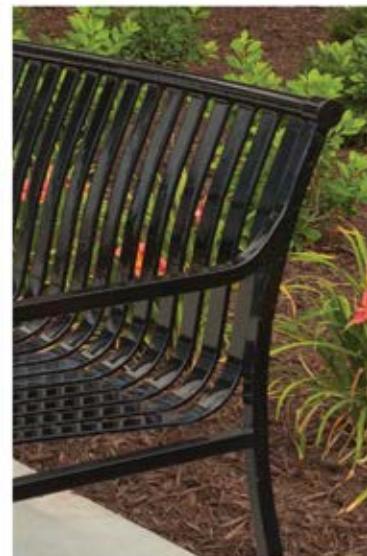
Bennett Rolfe Memorial Chapel, Integrated Studio, Cameron Campbell

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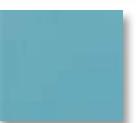
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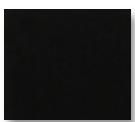
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